



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

**REGION 10**

1200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 900  
Seattle, WA 98101-3140

OFFICE OF  
ECOSYSTEMS, TRIBAL AND  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

June 7, 2010

Rick Brazell, Forest Supervisor:  
Clearwater National Forest  
12730 U.S. Highway 12  
Orofino, Idaho 83544

Re: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) comments for the Clearwater National Forest (Forest) Robo Elk Project (Project) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). (EPA Project Number: 10-019-AFS)

Dear Mr. Brazell:

This review was conducted in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. Under our policies and procedures, we evaluate the environmental impact of the proposed action and the adequacy of the impact statement. We have assigned a Lack of Objections (LO) rating to the DEIS. A copy of the EPA rating system is enclosed.

Overall, we do not object to the Proposed Action and support several of your stated purposes and desired future conditions for the Project. Maintaining the integrity of all streams and reducing sediment and the risk of pollutants to the Elk River municipal water intake is of primary importance. We also support managing for a diverse and healthy forest from a landscape perspective, and, addressing adverse impacts from motorized use.

In addition to supporting the overall purposes and desired future conditions of your Project we believe several elements within your proposal should help to mitigate potentially adverse impacts. For example, we support your use of INFISH buffers (Practice 14.06). We also appreciate the DEIS's Appendix C list of Best Management Practices, several of which go beyond what is required under the Idaho Forest Practices Act and the Idaho Water Resources Board (E.g., Practice 14.09 – Acceptance of Timber Sale Erosion Control Measures Before Sale Closure). Additionally, your Sediment Reduction Projects and efforts towards a minimum road system (systematic road decommissioning, road storage, dispersed site decompaction, and obliteration of undesignated trails) should help to achieve positive environmental results.

While we have not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal, we recommend you address the following items in the Final EIS to more fully disclose impacts and protect the environment. As stated in the DEIS's Appendix C, "A plan ensures foresight, but excellent administration is still required to be highly effective." To help set up the circumstances for excellent administration we recommend you consider the following:

1. We support your proposed adaptive management of dispersed recreation activities based on criteria (D. Monitoring, #3). Because destabilized streambanks, compacted soils and erosion from areas without vegetation present clear risks to water quality and fisheries we recommend that your decision thresholds be conservatively set. Please provide in the Final EIS and/or Record of Decision, additional information on your dispersed recreation criteria (E.g., specific decision thresholds) and how they would be used.
2. We are unsure how Alternative 2 would, "...restore soil conditions on 30 treatment units (*having existing detrimental soil conditions above regional soil quality standards*),..." (DEIS, p. 93). While using and decommissioning existing trails and landings may indeed, "...provide for a quicker recovery time than if the soil was left in an unproductive condition." (DEIS, p. 26) we do not believe the DEIS sufficiently discloses how these activities would restore 1,850 acres of existing detrimental soil disturbance. Similarly, while overwintering slash may mitigate detrimental effects from harvest activities, we are unsure how it provides for a quicker recovery than no-action and could therefore be considered restoration.

We recommend that the Final EIS include additional information on the difference between mitigation and restoration. Please discuss, for example, how Alternative 2's Project activities - including "Design measures required to Mitigate Detrimental Effects" - would restore soil conditions on 1,850 acres. We also recommend that the Final EIS identify any relevant science on how overwintering slash adequately provides for soil stability and future soil productivity.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment and if you have any questions or concerns please contact Erik Peterson of my staff at (206) 553-6382 or by electronic mail at [peterson.erik@epa.gov](mailto:peterson.erik@epa.gov).

Sincerely,



Christine B. Reichgott, Manager  
Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit

Enclosure:  
EPA Rating System for Draft Environmental Impact Statements



**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for  
Draft Environmental Impact Statements  
Definitions and Follow-Up Action\***

**Environmental Impact of the Action**

**LO – Lack of Objections**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

**EC – Environmental Concerns**

EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

**EO – Environmental Objections**

EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

**EU – Environmentally Unsatisfactory**

EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

**Adequacy of the Impact Statement**

**Category 1 – Adequate**

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

**Category 2 – Insufficient Information**

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

**Category 3 – Inadequate**

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

\* From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment. February, 1987.